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VA deploys Mobile Vet Centers to increase outreach during COVID-19 outbreak

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began deploying Mobile Vet Center units, the week of March 16, to expand direct counseling, outreach and care coordination to Veterans in communities affected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first of the mobile units was dispatched to various cities to include boroughs in New York City, a second unit was sent to San Francisco, followed by mobile centers going to New Orleans and Los Angeles.

VA's Mobile Vet Centers can also refer active duty service members, Veterans and their families to VA care or other care facilities in the community. They serve as an extension of VA's 300 brick-and-mortar Vet Centers across the country that provide a range of services, including individual, group, marriage and family counseling.

These mobile units help VA reach those who may not otherwise seek VA services for counseling and mental health support. Vet Center staff can assist those who may be facing extreme isolation during this period of "social distancing"—a practice that is needed to reduce the COVID-19 infection rate—but one that may likewise increase the vulnerability of some Veterans.

"While all Americans are being instructed to limit their contact with others, our duty to protect the nation's Veterans has not ended," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Our Vet Center staff will help ensure we keep in contact with those Veterans who need our care and attention and help reduce the anxiety some may be experiencing during this unique national emergency."

VA Mobile Vet Centers are available to help affected communities now and in the upcoming weeks. Vet Center employees, who volunteer for these missions, deploy in the wake of emergency response situations such as hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, shootings and other events. When engaging the public, VA employee volunteers are provided the necessary protections to keep them and those they help safe.

"In times like this it's important to stand shoulder to shoulder with our local communities, support their local needs and ensure them they are not alone in navigating this crisis," said Brooklyn Vet Center Director Gabe Botero, who volunteered for five days in New York City.

Veterans, active duty service members and their families are encouraged to [find their nearest Vet Center](#) and call to get connected to counseling services or reach out to the 24/7 Vet Center Call Center at 1-877-927-8387. Many Vet Centers are currently utilizing telehealth services through VA Video Connect and can also speak to individuals via phone to reduce any barriers to seeking necessary help.

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